

Featured Dojo-cho, June 2006



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Back in college, I did a lot of weight training. I also swam to balance the weight training and keep loose. The summer before my senior year, the college refinished the pool surface and after that, the water was just weird. It felt to me like there was fiberglass in it; at least it gave me that itchy fiberglass feeling when I swam. Of course the Physical Plant claimed there was nothing wrong, keep in mind that these were the same people who, when asked to make a section of grass green, actually painted it green instead of watering it. So, I and others stopped using the pool.

A friend suggested I try out one of the college's martial arts classes as a way to balance my weight training. Later, the PE department put on a demonstration of the various classes, so I was able to check the two styles out. What impressed me about the Aikido class was that the students seemed to be in control of what they were doing. During the other martial arts demo, it looked like they could barely keep from hurting their training partner. Their techniques didn't seem safe. The Aikido demo seemed, well, safer and it wasn't about hurting someone. That difference made me decide to try it.

I began training in January 1989 under Gary Porter Sensei, whose teacher Dwight Onshi Sensei had split with the Oregon Ki Society, and the classes were based on that 'style'. After college, I began training at Two Rivers Aikido, which was headed by David Gross Sensei, who had been a student of Linda Holiday Sensei in Santa Cruz, and Ken Brown Sensei, who trained in Gainesville, FL. While at Two Rivers, I had a chance to train with a number of Aikido instructors who moved into the Portland area. At that time, Two Rivers was about the only option for Aikido training in the Portland area besides the Oregon Ki Society, so various instructors came to train at Two Rivers for a while, before moving on to start their own dojos. Having these different instructors, with diverse backgrounds come through Two Rivers, gave me a chance to experience and learn from a number of different Aikido 'styles' during my formative Aikido years.

Eventually, I moved to Monterey, CA to attend graduate school. After moving there, I began training at Aikido of Monterey under Danielle Molles Smith Sensei and Dennis Evans Sensei in January 1992, which was my introduction to, what is now, the CAA and I have been a part of the organization ever since.

The decision to begin teaching on my own grew out of discussions I had with Craig Fife Sensei and Danielle Molles Smith Sensei. After returning to Portland, I maintained my association with Aikido of Monterey and received my dan ranks from Danielle Sensei. However, after some time I began to feel somewhat dojo-less. I had ties to the local dojos from earlier on, but I was more a welcome guest than a 'student' and Aikido of Monterey was far away. The desire to teach and share my Aikido had been instilled in me while training with Danielle Sensei at Aikido of Monterey and I wanted to continue teaching. One Saturday after class, I expressed some of this to Craig Sensei. He kindly pointed out that I was sandan now, and if I wanted to teach I shouldn't look to the local dojos, I should find some place where I could start my own classes.

Therefore, with the support of Danielle Sensei, Craig Sensei, and Frank Doran Shihan, I began my own dojo in September 2003. It is a small, in both space and class size, but growing, dojo. However, the students seem to appreciate the amount of individual attention they are able to receive and I get to train during class.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

Choosing a most memorable experience is difficult. However, what springs to mind is an instance in training with my buddy Mitch at Aikido of Monterey. Mitch and I are about the same size and started

Aikido only a few months apart. We took our ikkyu tests at Aikido of Monterey back to back and have been sort of 'on track' with each other ever since. Therefore, I guess you could say we are 'evenly matched'. We seem to be so evenly matched that, despite looking nothing alike, people have occasionally confused us with one another.

At the time, we were a few months away from gearing up for our nidan tests. I reached this point where I struggled a lot to throw him. He was my size, as strong as I was if not stronger, and we had trained together enough that he knew every hole to exploit. This was okay, because I knew all of his to. I guess you could say that we kept each other honest, but it meant I had to work for each technique.

Then one class, I don't know how, but something changed. It was easier to throw him for some reason. As we continued training that night, I began to realize that I was throwing farther than I physically could. He was too big, I wasn't that strong. It was the first time in my training that I felt I was tapping into something greater than my physical being. I was doing something beyond my physical limits and that somehow I had subconsciously found this 'Ki' thing my teachers had been talking to me about.

Of course the next night, when I tried to duplicate the night before, I couldn't and was back to trying to lug Mitch around. However, little by little, over the years, and because of that experience, I have come to appreciate that strength of Aikido is not limited by and exceeds the strength of our bodies.